

Ryan

VALLEY CENTER SUBDIVISION

The Transformation of Murray City, Utah

Architecture 522-1
History of Suburban Development
Professor Peter Goss

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 1950's two events occurred in the city of Murray, Utah, which signaled a major change in the community. The first was the closure of the American Smelting and Refining Company's Murray operations in 1950. The second was the 1954 completion of the new Murray Senior High School. The two institutions were within a "stone's throw" of each other west of State Street, the smelter on the north and the school on the south side of 5300 South.

The dates of these two events coincide with the major portion of development in the Valley Center Subdivision just west of the high school grounds. An examination of this subdivision reveals the remarkable transformation of Murray from a modestly independent city to a major suburb of Salt Lake in less than a decade.

Though today Murray retains many autonomous features, the community is more independent in spirit than in fact. One chronicler in 1965 claimed that since its incorporation in 1902 Murray "has been a self-sufficient community and refused to wear a suburban yoke."¹ Using the Valley Center Subdivision as a case study, it becomes apparent that Murray was well on its way to being "yoked" in the early fifties.

Though physically separated from the southern boundary of Salt Lake City by only a few miles, Murray has a long tradition of isolation. As early as 1848, settlers found the low lands

¹Murray City Elementary Schools Summer Workshop, "Facts and Information about Murray City, The Center of Salt Lake County, 1965" TMs, p. 2, Murray Public Library, Murray, Utah.

irrigated by two creeks to be well suited to agriculture.

The small homogenous group of scattered Mormon homesteaders changed radically with the completion of the Utah Southern Railroad (later Union Pacific) line through Murray in 1870. East railroad access, and an abundant water supply, made Murray a prime location for the smelter industry. By the end of 1872 six companies had been established in the area.¹ With the smelters came an influx of immigrant workers, mostly from Eastern and Southern Europe. By 1900, the population of Murray had swelled to nearly 5,000.¹ The 1900 census indicated that 49.0% of eligible workers in Murray were employed by smelters, compared to 25.7% in agriculture.¹

At this time the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO), a national corporation, was planning to build a massive plant somewhere in the Salt Lake Valley. In 1901, a group of Murray citizens bought several tracts of land north of 5300 South between the railroad and State Street in an attempt to counter an offer of free land and water from Sandy City.¹ ASARCO accepted the Murray "carrot", and by 1902 had built the largest lead smelter in the world at the site, producing 1200 tons of ore per day.⁶

¹David L. Schirer, "The Cultural Dynamics of Urbanization: Murray City, Utah, 1887-1919" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1991), 54.

¹"Facts and Information", 6.

¹Schirer, "Cultural Dynamics", 58.

¹Murray City Corporation, The History of Murray City (Murray City, Utah: Stanway/Wheelwright Printing Co., 1976), 253.

¹Schirer, "Cultural Dynamics", 64-65.

By 1905, the city limits were enlarged and Murray was declared a second-class city (see figure 1, appendix A).¹ The newly incorporated city's economic base was rapidly changing. By 1910, the US census indicated that only 11.4% of Murray workers farmed, 42.6% were smelter employees, while the remainder of the workforce was employed in a growing service sector.²

For thirty years, ASARCO continued to be Murray's largest employer, employing anywhere from 300 to 600 workers during peak production. However, the Depression had its effect on ASARCO as elsewhere. Gradual shutdown of operations began on October 15, 1949 and by November, 1950, the American Smelting and Refining Company had completely closed its Murray plant.

*influence
of end of
WWII?*

During ASARCO's economic domination of Murray, the city's population remained around 5,000. In 1940, the population was 5,740. A decade later, the large numbers of World War II veterans and their burgeoning families had swelled the census count to 9,006.³ The 1948-1949 school year found the Murray School Board considering their over-capacity elementary school system and the problem which would soon be transferred to an already inadequate junior/senior high school. In 1941, Murray School District purchased nineteen acres of smelter property south of 5300 across from the existing high school on the east side of State Street. This site was selected for the construction of a new senior high

¹History of Murray City, 26.

²Schirer, "Cultural Dynamics", 58.

³"Facts and Information", 16.

school. On June 21, 1950 taxpayers authorized a tax increase to pay for the new complex.¹⁰

The first buildings were completed in 1952. Construction continued past September 1, 1954, the date on which the junior and senior high schools officially separated and the old Murray High became Hillcrest Junior High. The need for classroom space was so pressing that on March 13, 1951, the Murray Eagle, Murray's weekly newspaper reported the new school building would be used as elementary school to be later converted to a high school.¹¹ This strategy was not used, but it demonstrates the rate at which the population of Murray was increasing.

The cause of this growth was, of course, the incredible post-war building industry boom. The Salt Lake Tribune reported record high yearly building permits for the Murray area in 1949-1951, most of these in residential construction.¹² One developer who was a part of this tremendous growth was Bernard P. Brockbank, a cousin of Salt Lake City merchant-builder, Alan E. Brockbank. Brockbank owned the Bernard P. Brockbank & Sons Real Estate and Construction Company located at 3400 Highland Drive in Salt Lake City. In an interview conducted by the author, the 84 year-old Brockbank remembers the fifties as a time when builders like himself were attempting to answer a tremendous demand for decent housing at a

¹⁰History of Murray, 154.

¹¹Murray Eagle, March 13, 1951, 1.

¹²"Building Hits Peak," Salt Lake Tribune, 3 January 1951, 22.

decent price."¹¹

THE VALLEY CENTER SUBDIVISION

Bernard Brockbank developed one of the earliest post-WW II subdivisions in Murray, the Liberty Gardens Subdivision in 1948. Across from the 1905 Liberty Elementary School on 6100 South and 300 West, the group approximately 70 homes constitute a fairly attractive neighborhood today (see photo 1, appendix B). On March 31, 1950, with an eye to the imminent construction of the new high school, Brockbank purchased several acres of uncultivated farmland from John R. and Vera Riley bordering the high school site at its south-west corner. Surveyor Sam Fisher, subdivided the land into 75 lots and on December 21, 1950, the plat was filed with Salt Lake County by Bernard Brockbank and his wife Nada (see figure 2, appendix A).¹² The project was named the Valley Center Subdivision, presumably after the Valley Center Ward of the LDS church in the same area.

Situated half-way between State Street and the railroad tracks, the subdivision was bordered by fields to the west and southwest. The area had two housing antecedents to north: the Woodrow complex and the "community center" houses. Both had been built 40 years earlier in response to the lack of adequate housing in Murray which had forced many immigrant workers into "smelter

¹¹Bernard P. Brockbank, interview by author, 20 November 1992, Salt Lake City.

¹²"Valley Center Subdivision," plat filed in Salt Lake County recorder's office, 21 December 1950.

slums". In 1910, John Wood constructed ten rental houses on his property along what is now known as Woodrow Street and within the year sold the houses to ASARCO. One year later, ASARCO also responded to the housing need by building several foreman houses on 5300 South and fourteen worker houses west of Woodrow on what became known as Community Center (5325 South), because of the club house built in addition to the houses.¹⁴

By the 1940's, the Woodrow houses had been privately owned for several years and were in fairly good condition; but Reed Clegg, reported in his 1937 thesis that the some of the community center houses were unoccupied and the club house boarded up, a condition which still existed in 1950.¹⁶ It is for perhaps this reason that Brockbank chose not to connect his new subdivision with the older homes on Woodrow and Community Center, but to the more recent housing southeast on Rose Circle.

Rose Circle (the Normandy Subdivision) was built between 1946-1947, and consisted of 32 homes on a circle one block west of State Street. Though Hillcrest Drive is shown completely connected to 5300 South on the plat of the subdivision, one resident reported that for many years the only access in and out of the neighborhood was via Rose Circle to State Street.¹⁷ This is confirmed on a 1952

¹⁴Schirer, "Cultural Dynamics," 133-140.

¹⁶Reed K. Clegg, "A Sociological Survey of Murray" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1937), 77; Polk's Salt Lake City (Salt Lake County, Utah) Directory 1951, (Salt Lake City, UT: R.L. Polk & Co., 1951).

¹⁷Joyce Turnbow, interview by author, 4 December 1992, Murray, Utah.

engineer's map of Murray (see figure 3, appendix A).¹⁸ Hillcrest Drive was connected to Woodrow most likely just before the 1957 completion of the high school complex.

Brockbank states that he was responsible for the layout of the subdivision. Valley Center consisted mainly of one straight street, American Avenue, and one curvilinear street, Washington Avenue, running west from Hillcrest Drive. Between American and Washington was a rectangular public play area. American Avenue ended at the Riley property on the west side. Washington Avenue included one small dead-end road which was probably built to accommodate an existing house on lot 28 (see photo 1, appendix B).¹⁹

The land was divided into 75 lots with an average lot size of 70' wide by 130' deep. On April 5, 1951, an amended plat of the subdivision was filed at the request of Murray City Corporation which changed the east boundaries just slightly (see figure 4, appendix A).²⁰ The adjustments were probably made regarding lot number 48, one of two lots Brockbank specified could be used by the high school in the deed restrictions filed on February 5, 1951 (figure 5, appendix A).

The deed restrictions also specified that only single family residences could be built on the property. Residences were to be

¹⁸Metropolitan Engineers, Inc. Map, Murray City, Salt Lake County, Utah (Salt Lake City, Utah: Metropolitan Engineers, 1952).

¹⁹In 1956 this small road was connected to Wilson Avenue and became the Spurrier Subdivision development.

²⁰"Valley Center Subdivision Amended," plat filed in Salt Lake County Recorder's office, 5 April 1951.

worth at least \$4,500 and have a minimum square footage of 650 square feet. The setback requirements were thirty feet from the front lotline and eight feet on either side. Infrastructure was put in place by the Brockbank company with connections made to the Murray City water and sewage systems. The street was lit by a few standard street lights. The streets, then as today, had gutters but no curbs or sidewalks, and landscaping was left up to the original owners.

no racial restrictions?

The houses were built in three phases, each consisting of a distinct house type (see figure 6, appendix A). Brockbank Construction provided architect, general contractor and labor for house construction. The houses built in Valley Center Subdivision differed from the earlier Liberty Gardens homes in two important aspects. One, the Valley Center homes would include a garage (similar to the homes on Rose Circle); and two, the new homes would be brick (see photos 2-4, appendix B). Homes were to be built in the \$8,000-9,000 range.

The first homes built were west of Hillcrest Drive on Washington Avenue. The home of Joe and Dorothy Gallegos at 81 West Washington is an example of this first type (type A; see photo 7, appendix B). The Gallegos' purchased the home in 1952 for approximately \$8,000 from the original owner and still reside there today.²¹

The house was built of load-bearing masonry with simple gable

²¹Joe and Dorothy Gallegos, interview by author, 2 December 1992, Murray, Utah.

roofs, the line of the ridge parallel to the street. Different treatments of the projecting porch roof and varying colors or brick were used to distinguish one home from another. The one story home had approximately 700 square feet of living space, but no basements. A unique feature of these homes was the slightly projected dining alcove, which visually, though not physically, connected the house to the garage (see photo 8). The plan included living room, kitchen, two bedrooms and a bath (see figure 7, appendix A).

The Gallegos family, on the whole, have been very happy with their home, but eventually found the area too small. In 1959, after the birth of their fourth child, they converted their garage into a third bedroom. Many in the neighborhood also transformed their garages into extra living space, while many made additions on the back. The most radically altered house is at 55 West Washington which now boasts a two-story addition, as well as completely new brick (see photos 9 and 10).

Several modified type A houses were built on Washington, mostly east of Hillcrest Drive. These homes were listed as under construction in the 1952 Polk directory.¹¹ The plan eliminated the projecting dining area and the exteriors had both pitched and hipped roofs (see photos 11 and 12). These houses have also undergone many changes. The Andersons at 9 West Washington converted their garage into a family room, changed their driveway

¹¹Polk's Salt Lake City (Salt Lake County, Utah) Directory 1952, (Salt Lake City, UT: R.L. Polk & Co., 1952).

and built a large garage at the back of their property (see photo 13).

The next set of houses (type B) were built at the east end of American Avenue (see photos 14 and 15). Virginia Cannon, the original and still present owner of 89 West American, bought her home in 1953 (see photo 16). At the time, hers was one of the few houses on American. Brockbank remembered that some of the Valley Center homes were not built by his company, but he could not remember the builder. According to Mrs. Cannon, her home and those similar to it were built by a man named Ebert.¹¹ Mrs. Cannon and her husband James, paid \$10,500 for their home. These homes also had two bedrooms, but the overall dimensions of the home were larger than the type A. Similarly, many of the type B garages have been made into extra rooms. The Cannons converted their garage into a dining room in 1967.

Apparently the need for more living space came to Brockbank's attention, because the last group of homes constructed in the subdivision had three bedrooms and no garage. These type C houses were the most numerous and were built by Brockbank Construction in 1953-1954. Most of these houses were built along the curving portion of Washington and the west end of American (see photos 17 and 18). The type C home was less boxlike than either A or B, with an emphasis on horizontality. It featured a large picture window for the living room and long, high rectangular windows for other

¹¹Virginia Cannon, interview by author, 5 December 1992, Murray, Utah.

rooms (see photo 20). The houses are distinguished by varying colors of brick and mortar, as well as either a overhanging eave or a projecting gable front porch. *-Gauges included??*

The Larry and Lorraine Smith home at 112 West Washington is an example of a type C house (see photos 21-22). The square footage of the type C home was approximately 800 square feet. In plan, the kitchen was enlarged to almost equal the size of the living room (see figure 8, appendix A). These homes originally had an opening on either side of the living room. Many of these openings have been closed off with shelves of some kind. The original price of a type C house was also \$10,500. The Smith's paid \$15,500 for the home in 1967."

Despite the extra bedroom, many type C homes also have major additions. The previous owner of the Smith home, carved out a full basement underneath the house. This drastic measure was most likely taken because of the wedged-shaped lot, but others in the subdivision have also added basements. The majority of these home owners have added a detached garage behind the house. Some of the type C homes, like the home of Bill and Joyce Turnbow, remain virtually unchanged, except for new windows and trim (see photo 23). While across the street, the home of Matt and Lena Borovatz, the garage added in 1960 and the family room (1967) have drastically altered the look of the house (see photo 24)."

"Larry and Lorraine Smith, interview by author, 4 December 1992, Murray, Utah.

"Matt Borovatz, interview by author, 7 December 1992, Murray, Utah.

The last of the type C homes were built on Hillcrest Circle, where lots 44-47 were reoriented and a LDS seminary building built on lot 48 (see photos 25-26). Bernard Brockbank did not remember whether he had donated the property for the seminary; but the size of lot 48 suggests had such a donation in mind when the property was surveyed in 1950.

By 1954, most of the lots had houses on them. The two split-level homes, built in 1957, halfway down American were the last new homes (see photo 27). The subdivision had become a neighborhood. The neighbors first combined efforts were directed toward making the play area suitable for playing. Brockbank designed the play area to be away from the streets accessed only by two narrow walkways (see photo 28). He donated the land to residents of Valley Center Subdivision, but they were charged with the task of developing it. Elsa DeMann, formerly of 35 West Washington, recalled that the neighbors held a carnival in order to raise money for black-topping and installing playground equipment in the park.["] Officially known, as the Valley Center Park, it is just the "park" to residents. Two or three property owners installed gates in their backyards for the convenience of the their children.

This spirit of cooperation has continued through the forty year history of the Valley Center Subdivision. In the late 1950's, when Murray City took over the maintenance of the park, Virginia Cannon and her neighbor each donated an 8 ft. strip of property,

["]Jack and Elsa DeMann, interview by author, 28 November 1992, Murray, Utah.

in order to widen the walkway from American (see photo 29). A decade later, when the original equipment was deteriorating, the neighbors asked Murray City to refurbish the park. The sand pit and green areas in the park today were part of that renovation (see photos 31-32). As recently as 1992, with the park once again in decline and used as a haven for high school truants, the ladies in the area have organized an effort to pick weeds, paint picnic tables and renovate the basketball court.

The residents have gone to great lengths to preserve the sanctity of their neighborhood. In the late sixties, the construction of Interstate I-15 as far as 5300 South brought increased outside traffic into the subdivision. Both large trucks from the manufacturing area to the west as well as semi-trucks hauling automobiles from State Street car-dealerships used the neighborhood as a shortcut between the freeway and State Street. Concerned about safety and noise, the neighbors petitioned Murray City to have a permanent barricade erected at the intersection of American and Riley Lane. The barrier stands today (see photo 32).

The children of neighborhood grew up together. Most of them graduated from Murray High School in the decade between 1965-1975. Several ladies in the neighborhood get together with their daughters for an annual luncheon. Joyce Turnbow, the resident who headed the committee to erect the barricade, feels that despite great differences (referring mostly to religion), the neighbors have a remarkable sense of community.¹⁷ Twenty-three families have

¹⁷Turnbow, interview.

lived in the subdivision thirty-five years or more.

Forty years is a long time to stay in one place, and most residents echoed the sentiment of Joe Gallegos, "I wouldn't have stayed here if I didn't like it."¹ The "staying power" of the neighborhood can be attributed to many features. The most significant contributing factor was the homogenous socio-economic background of the original home purchasers in the subdivision. Without exception, the residents interviewed for this study were young married couples with two or three small children when they purchased their Valley Center Subdivision homes. Most of their neighbors fit the same profile.

Ethnically, the majority of the original residents had English or Scandinavian progenitors. Although a few names of Eastern European origin appear in the Polk directories, it is not known whether they had any connection to the immigrant workers of the previous generation. The high percentage of immigrants in Murray declined with the smelter industry. A few original owners, like Bill Turnbow and Matt Borovatz, whose parents lived on Woodrow and 5300 South respectively, were Murray High graduates, but most of the early residents of Valley Center came from other parts of Utah.

Joe Gallegos, head of an early Hispanic family in the neighborhood, had relocated his family from Bingham. He chose the neighborhood because of its proximity to the high school. For most people, a combination of location, housing stock, and of course, price attracted them to the neighborhood. When asked how the homes

¹Gallegos, interview.

were marketed, Bernard Brockbank replied that although his company sometimes used newspaper advertisements, the best method was to construct a house, and leave it open. A simple approach effectively used during a period in history when so many young couples were looking for a nice place to "settle-down" and raise their kids. The Valley Center homes sold quickly.⁹

The Polk directory for 1955 indicates that the neighborhood contained a cross-section of middle income heads of household. There were 11 salesmen and several mechanics, machinists and electricians. There were also clerks, drivers, accountants, and many who worked in building and construction trades. Two men owned their own business, one had a service station, the other a barber shop. Three worked for a Salt Lake firm called EIMCO and interestingly, eight were employed by the Kennecott Corporation. Besides Kennecott, residents worked for other major Utah employers such as Geneva Steel, Mountain Fuel and the Deseret News. One resident was a fire-fighter for Salt Lake County and one taught at Granite High School.¹⁰

The most remarkable aspect of this analysis is that in 1955, only two workers were employed within Murray City limits. James Cannon was the superintendent for Murray Power and Light, and another resident worked for Hi-land Dairy. One woman, Barbara Olson (not listed in the Polk directory), was a counselor at Murray High School. The majority, however, were working males who left

⁹Brockbank, interview.

¹⁰Polk, 1955.

Murray in the morning as per traditional patterns of suburban living. This condition is in direct contrast to the smelter dominated workforce in the area a generation earlier. Today, according to the 1991 Polk directory, the 1955 "bread-winners" are listed as retired. Many of their wives are working full or part-time jobs. Of the new heads of households listed, only one currently works in Murray.¹¹

From 1940-1950, the population of Murray nearly doubled. In 1964, the population was approximately 23,000, a 250% increase from 1950. More than half of the population was below the age of 21.¹² The remarkable growth of Murray over this period can be attributed to the number of entrepreneurs, like Bernard P. Brockbank, who developed Murray subdivisions. One history of Murray lists 56 subdivisions and major housing developments, 25 of which date between 1945-1955 (see figure 9, appendix A).¹³ The date listed for the Valley Center Subdivision is June, 1952, a pivotal time for the Murray area.

In the previous year, on October 18, 1951, a new zoning ordinance was approved by the city commission. The Murray Eagle published the zoning ordinance text and map in its November 16, 1951 issue, the date the ordinance went into effect. The Valley Center Subdivision, then under construction, was given a "B-2"

¹¹Polk, 1991.

¹²"Facts and Information," 16.

¹³History of Murray, 137.

residential designation (see figure 10-10A, appendix A).¹⁴ While zoning districts in Murray had been proposed as early as 1936, it was not until the post-war building boom that serious attention was given to zoning restrictions.¹⁵ A week after the publication of the zoning map, the Eagle published an article headlined, "Zoning Ordinance Now In Effect; Has Teeth, Too!"¹⁶ This article stated that not only would there be more severe penalties for zoning infractions, but that all future annexations would be given the most restricted designation, Residential District "A". Clearly, Murray was gearing up for an onslaught of suburbanites.

In the year 1952, Murray City approved several municipal projects, including a new post office and a city-wide water and sewage system. The extent of this latter project is indicated by a 1952 fire-protection map of Murray (see figure 11, appendix A).¹⁷ Before the completion of I-15, State Street was the main thoroughfare for commuter traffic. In 1952, traffic lights were installed at 4500 South and 5900 South, "allowing east-west traffic greater access and pedestrians a more even chance in crossing at Murray's intersections."¹⁸ The light at 5300 South was hung in 1954.

¹⁴Murray Eagle (Murray, Utah), 16 November 1951.

¹⁵History of Murray, 106.

¹⁶Murray Eagle, 23 November 1951, 1.

¹⁷Board of Fire Underwriters of the Pacific, Map of Murray City, Salt Lake County, Utah (n.p.: The Board, 1952).

¹⁸History of Murray, 110.

The most meaningful, if only symbolic, change of 1952 came from the students of Murray High School. The 1925 Murray High's basketball team had been nick-named the Smelterites by a Salt Lake city sports reporters during the State Basketball Tournament and the name stuck.¹³ A year later the school colors were changed to black and orange, which according to one source, represented the orange tailings flowing over the black slag.¹⁴ It is no wonder that the 1952 student-body voted to change their school mascot from Smelterites to Spartans.

Today most Murray High school students have no inkling of the origin of their school colors. The two ASARCO smokestacks are the only remnants of Murray's smelter history. The panorama they overlook has certainly changed. In 1955, the Salt Lake County Planning Commission published a 1975 projection of land use map which shows the east-side of Murray consumed by low to moderate density housing (see figure 12, appendix A).¹⁵ An aerial view of Salt Lake County today would prove the projection was accurate and reveal the west-side of Murray now similarly engulfed by massive suburban sprawl.

Many Murray citizens proudly point out the advantages of their small city: the power and water systems, the school district and

¹³Murray High School, Crest 1966: 50th Anniversary Issue, 1916-1966. Yearbook of Murray High School. (n.p. 1966), 5.

¹⁴Murray City Corporation, Murray Historical Tour, September 9, 1989, (n.p.: Murray City Corp., 1989).

¹⁵Salt Lake County (Utah). Planning Commission, Salt Lake County land use projected to 1975, (Salt Lake City: Planing Commission, 1955).

an overall sense of community; but in terms of physical space, the demise of Murray's independence from urban Salt Lake began over forty years. The land has been divided and subdivided (see figure 13, appendix A).⁴ The Valley Center Subdivision, nestled comfortably between State Street's commercial strip and I-15 industrial zone, in the shadow of the old smokestacks is a tangible reminder of Murray's remarkable transformation from small industrial city to massive suburb.

⁴Murray City Chamber of Commerce, Map of Murray (Murray: Murray City Chamber of Commerce, 1988).

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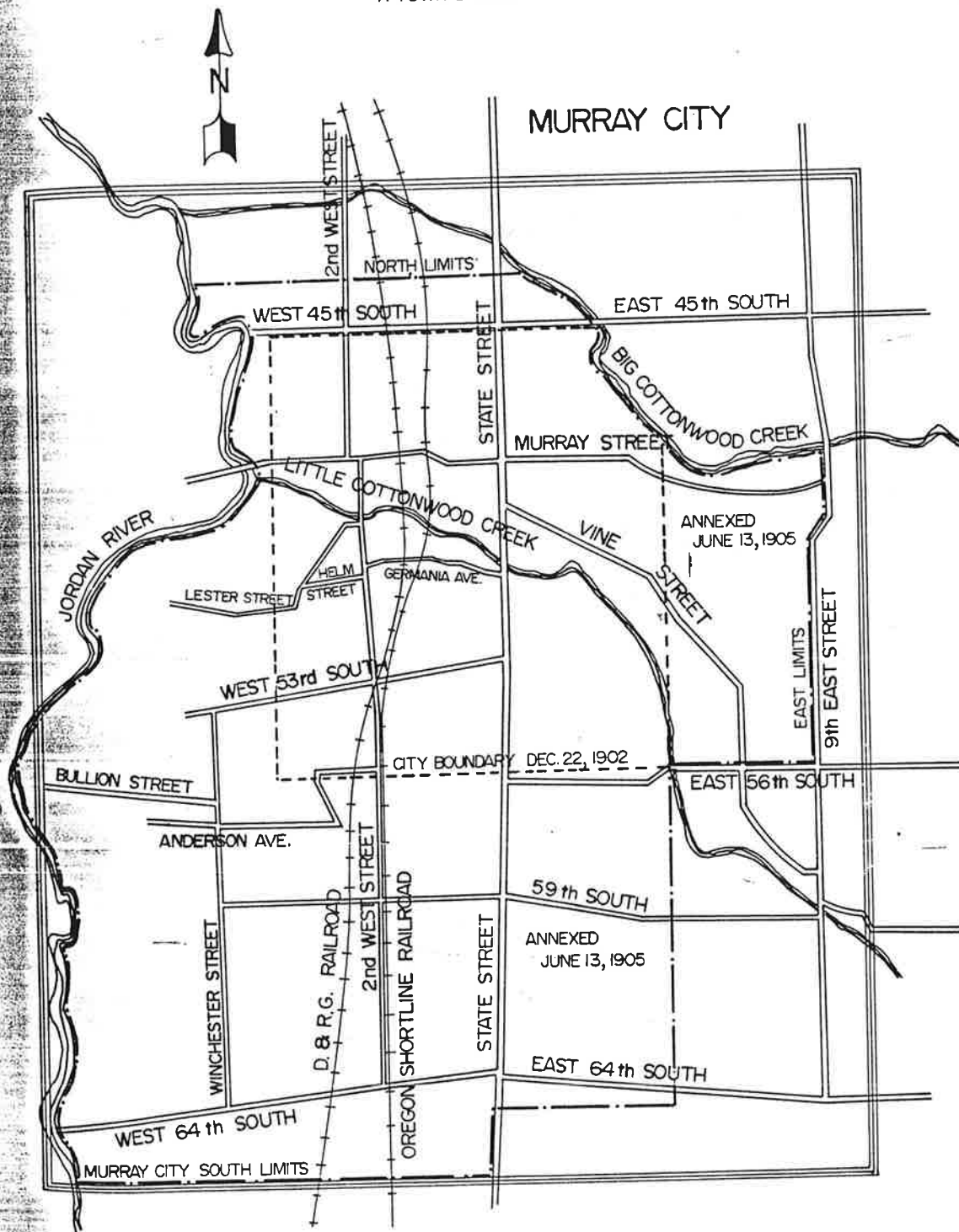
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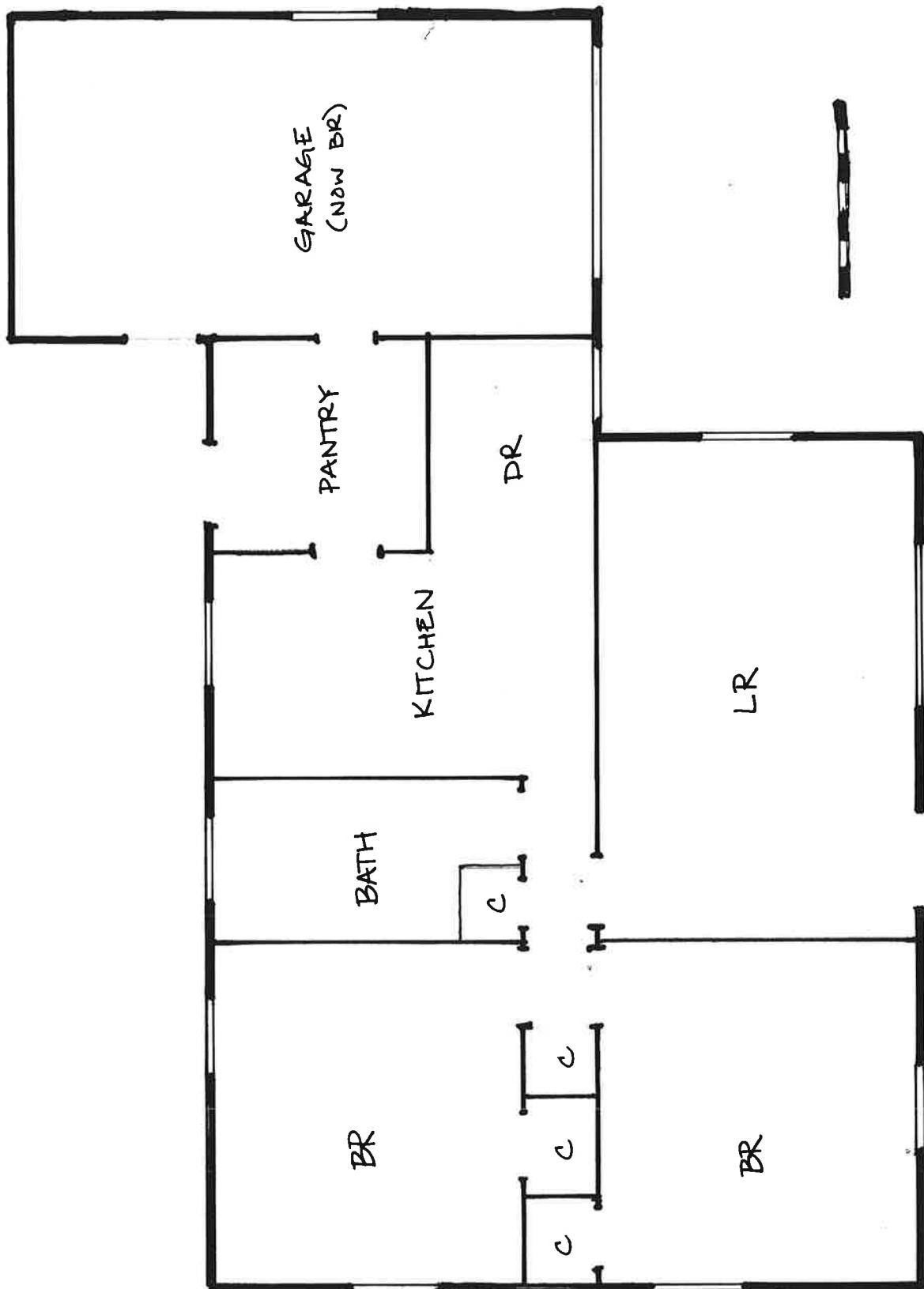
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13, 1905. Map
R. Rasmussen
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Picture opposite page is Murray City at the time of incorporation. It also shows the boundary change June 13, 1905. Map was taken from "The History of Murray" by R. R. Rasmussen 1936.

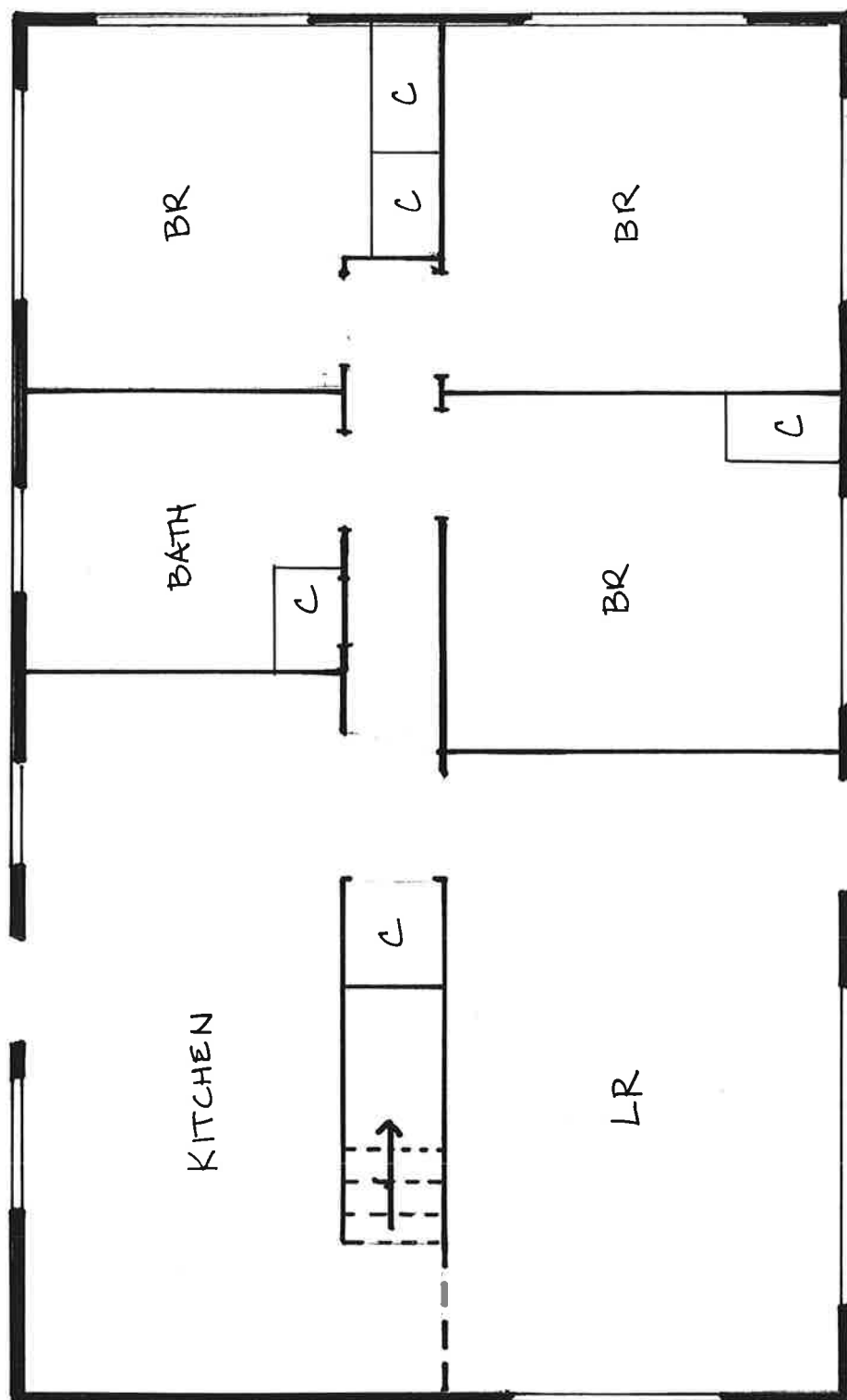
Courtesy Charles Clay and the City Engineering Department

FIGURE 1



TYPE A HOUSE, FLOOR PLAN

FIGURE 7



TYPE C HOUSE, FLOOR PLAN

FIGURE 8



PHOTO 2

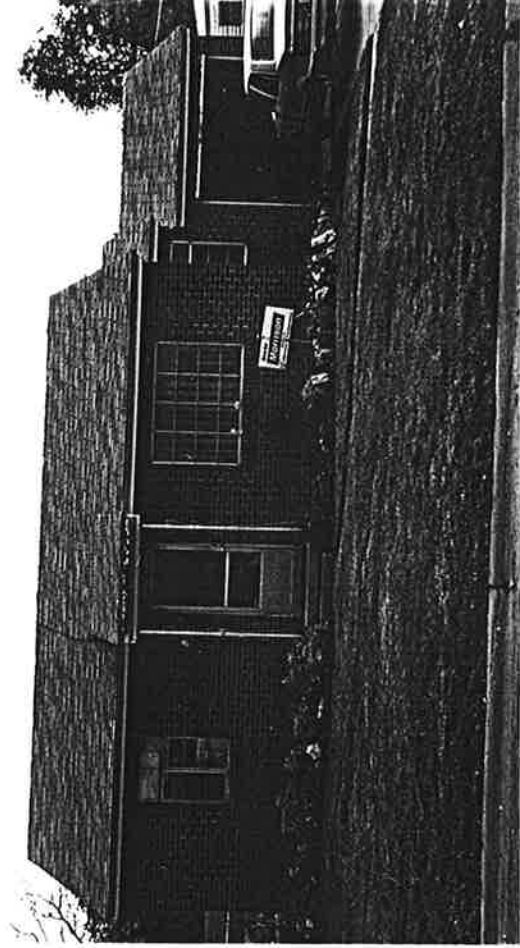




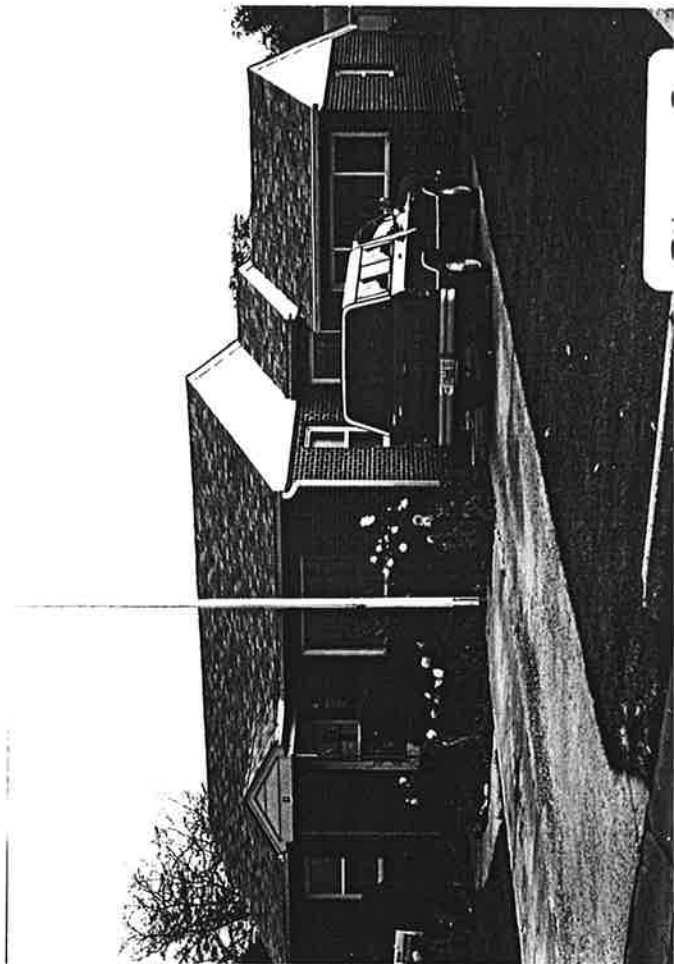
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PHOTO 6



PHOTO 7



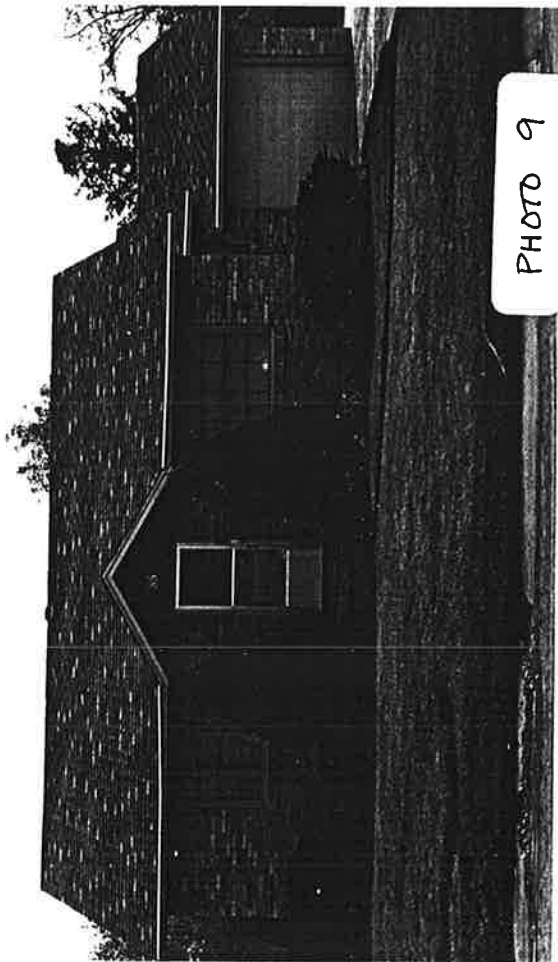


PHOTO 9

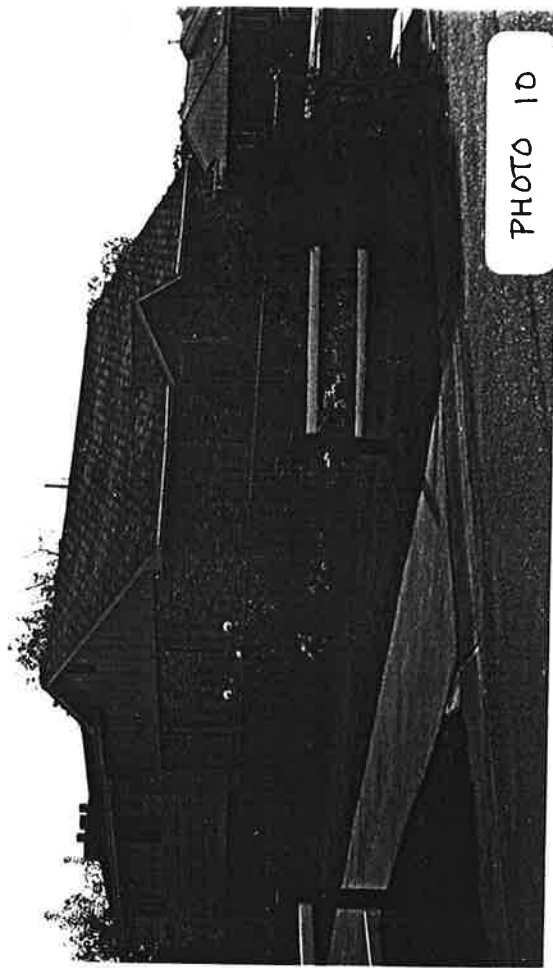


PHOTO 10

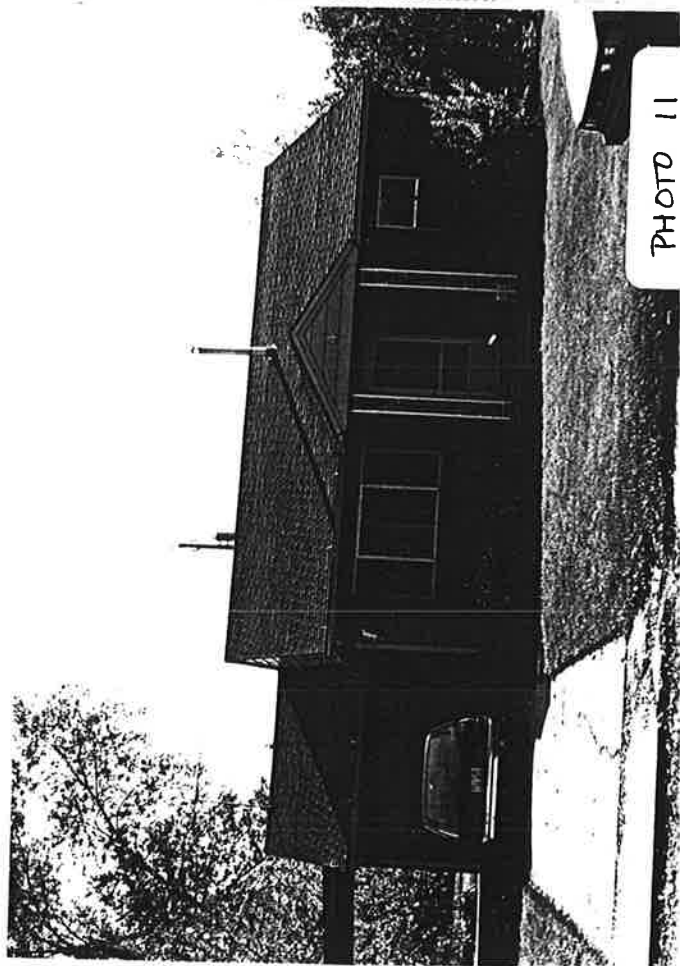


PHOTO 11



PHOTO 12